

A Sabbath Evening With a Chasidic Rabbi

By Leo Wolfson.

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The arrival in New York of Rabbi Elimelech Horowitz, the "Mieletzer rabbi," of the well-known Rapshitzer rabbinical family, was heralded far and wide. The metropolitan and Jewish dailies chronicled the event and gave much space to the details of his enthusiastic reception. Indeed, he was received by his many "Chasidim"—and they must be numbered by the thousands,—in a manner which leaves no doubt as to their sentiments and reverence. In the morning when he landed from the steamer, he was greeted by thousands of people, and in an imposing procession of hundreds of automobiles, he was conducted with much pomp and glory through thronged streets to the Mieletzer Synagogue on the East Side and thence to the residence which his followers fitted up for him—a small house in Avenue D.

Throughout the entire week he was the principal topic of discussion. Many who saw him and many others who spoke to him, were enthusiastic in their praise of him. To many, his arrival and residence here, meant the re-establishment of the "Chasidic" cult, with much of its poetry and quaintness. Under the circumstances, it was to be expected that his first "Sabbath evening table," would be an event of great importance, and many, besides his own followers, prepared themselves to be present.

I yielded to a desire to live over

again a Sabbath evening at the table of a "Chasidic" rabbi, and I gladly accepted the invitation of one of his intimate followers, to be present at this occasion.

Friday evening at the appointed time I started for the residence of the rabbi. It was impossible to get anywhere near it. Several thousand people were there ahead of me, crowding the Avenue and adjoining streets. With the aid of my police card and after a hard struggle, I finally reached his house. But here again, it was absolutely impossible to gain admittance. The little house was crowded to capacity. I have never seen so many people in one little house as I saw that evening—nor have I ever seen people so eager and anxious for a mere glimpse at a face as was that crowd there to see the Rabbi's face. I learned there that the Rabbi would hold his first table in the vestry rooms of the Mieletzer Synagogue. It required the utmost exertion to walk over the two short blocks from the rabbi's residence to the synagogue, and there, only the "pull" of an entourage of the Rabbi's got me past the officer, who would not permit any one else in because the synagogue was overcrowded.

What a picturesque gathering of Jews there was in the synagogue! I never knew that we had in New York such patriarchal looking Jews, with

so many white and dark flowing beards, so many beautiful and impressive faces. The sight was a feast in itself. The enthusiasm which prevailed is impossible of description. In little groups those present were talking and extolling the praises and wonders of the rabbis of this great rabbinical family. Many were telling of the rabbi's great piety and learning, and what great things they were expecting of him now that he was here.

It was after ten o'clock in the evening when it was announced that the rabbi had arrived. The crowd became silent. The Rabbi, dressed in a black silk gown with a "scharaimel" as a head covering, escorted by his "gabaim", passed through a lane of eager men, anxious to catch a glimpse of his face. Those in the rear stood up on benches, bending and craning their necks just to see him. The Rabbi is of imposing figure. His face is beautiful indeed—of pale dark complexion. He has an abundance of soft, black hair, a long black beard, and mild, wistful eyes radiating sweetness and piety.

The Sabbath solemnity and joy were reflected on his face, and there was something indescribably exquisite on it.

The Rabbi seated himself at the head of the table, and many prominent "Chasidim" were seated around long tables which has been put up for the occasion. The less fortunate were standing in rows upon rows, completely filling the room.

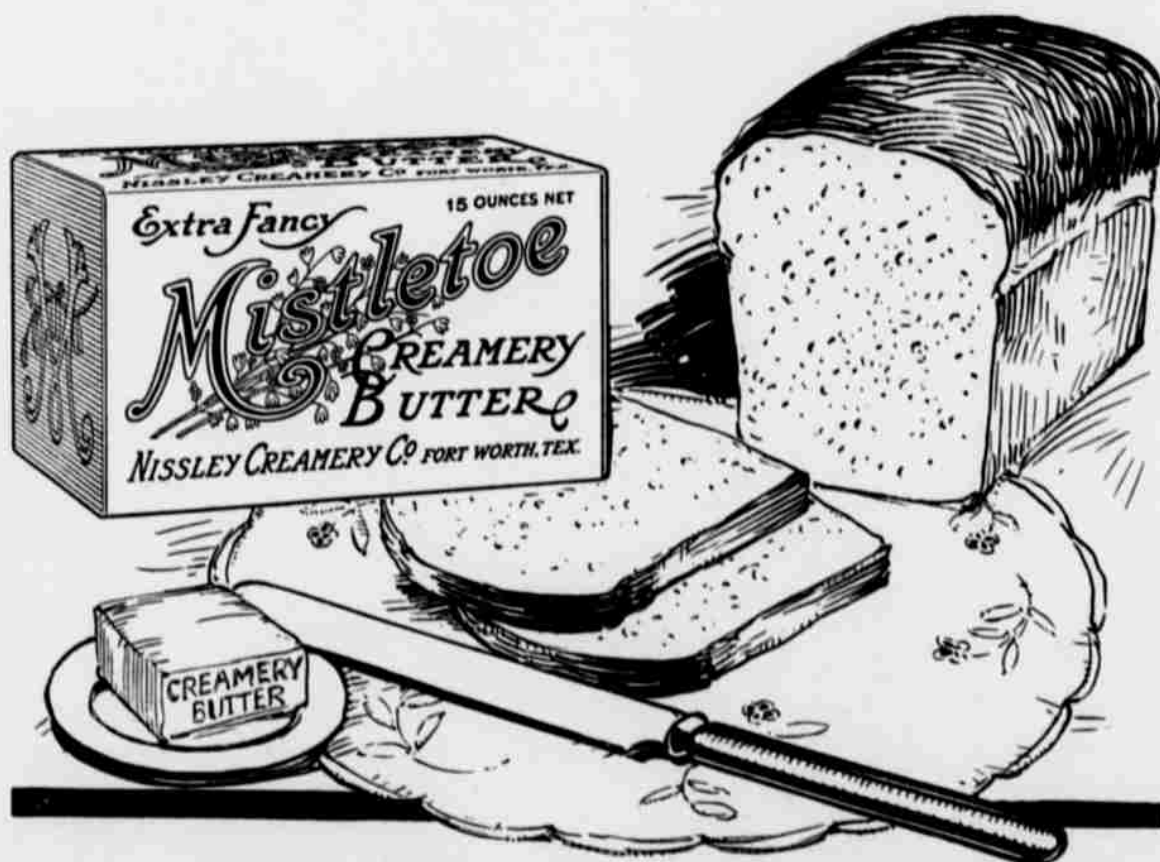
It was a "Chasidic" table in all its details with all its beauty and bizarreness. The Rabbi began to chant the "Sholom Aleichem." His voice was a revelation to his hearers. The Mieletzer Chasidim are familiar with the

melody and therefore knew where to join in the singing—and when the chant was finished there were tears of joy and sadness in the eyes of many. It was pathetic to see the ecstasy of these people and the fervor with which they entered into the spirit of the singing. The rabbi's voice sounded infinitely sweet, and the "melancholy Jewish motif" actually caused one's heart to ache. A hush came over the great crowd when the Rabbi rose to say the "Kiddush." In a sonorous, yet here and there, delicately shaded voice, he recited the prayer—in the same manner and style as is the custom of his family. Many of those present remembered the "Kiddush" of the father and grandfather of the Rabbi and wept, listening to the familiar tones. There was a wealth of poetry in it.

For a meal, the Rabbi took off his black silk gown and the Tallith and remained dressed in a blue green colored silk gown which, in that sombre dressed crowd, gave him added distinction and charm.

The ceremony of the "Moitze" over the bread was very quaint. There were twelve little breads. The Rabbi took each one in his hand while he was reciting the prayers. Two of the breads were left on the table, and these he cut into pieces which were distributed amongst the faithful. Of the fish the rabbi ate several small bits and then cut the balance into small pieces. To one of the men sitting near him he personally gave a small piece, and the rest—the "sherayi"—the "Chasidim" around eagerly divided amongst themselves.

Then another chant. This one the rabbi himself chanted. Everyone listened attentively to the plaintive



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